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HAPPY HOUR AND ALCOHOL ABUSE

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attitudes in military life that affect the use and abuse of alcohol. The writer believes that to arrive at the point of relevance, three objectives must be searched out: (1) determine the extent of the alcohol abuse problem in the military, (2) identify the attitudes and atmosphere that contributes to promoting of alcohol abuse, and (3) suggest solutions to alcohol abuse in the military, and ways in which the military can meet the challenge of doing something about alcohol abuse.

CHAPTER I

THE EXTENT OF ALCOHOL ABUSE IN THE MILITARY

Until recently, the full extent of alcohol abuse in the military was unknown. It is evident that it does exist. New efforts have been made to determine how big the problem really is. The first valid survey taken indicated the following:

The U.S. Army conceded yesterday that 70 per cent of its enlisted men and 36 per cent of its officers are either "heavy" or "problem" drinkers. ³

Heavy drinkers are defined as "people who have five drinks daily for four days." ⁴ The problem drinkers are defined into two broad groups:

(1) The younger serviceman whose drinking was repetitive, was undisciplined, and had caused themselves and their commanders problems and (2) older servicemen whose alcoholism had taken on more serious physical and psychological aspects. ⁵

There are many other factors that must be considered to determine the extent of alcoholism in the military.

³"Army Admits 7 Out of 10 GIs, 36% of Brass Heavy Drinkers," Staten Island News, 9 September 1973, p. 17.

⁴"Drunk Findings Disputed," Army Times, 3 October 1973, p. 1.

⁵U.S., Congress, Senate, Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, Alcoholism Among Military Personnel by Elmer B. Staats, Committee Print, (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1971), p. 5.

Alcoholism cannot be determined by the amount an individual drinks over a period of time. "Alcoholism...interferes with the individual's health, interpersonal relations or economic functioning." ⁶

It appears that the reason research is now being done in the area of alcoholism is due in part to drug abuse. The drug abusers said it was less dangerous to use drugs than alcohol.

Since the studies in this field are relatively new, valid statistics are not available at the present time.

⁶Ibid., p. 3.

CHAPTER III

THE ATTITUDES AND ATMOSPHERE THAT CONTRIBUTE TO ALCOHOL ABUSE

Man has been put to the test of his ability to cope with excesses since early civilization. In Greece and Rome, two civilizations basic to the western culture of today, excesses in food, drink and sex became the norm. As the American frontier was pushed westward, the man of the West was expected to be able to drink, to brawl, and to come out alive. All of this leads to the fact that the man of the military carries on in a long tradition.

The military man is supposed to be able to drink as much as he wants when he is not on duty, and to report for duty no worse for wear. "The social life of the officer is prescribed by both written and unwritten traditions."⁷ These include being able to drink like a "gentleman" - to "hold his alcohol." Most military functions include the serving of alcoholic beverages and one is encouraged to participate.

Many soldiers coming into the military are quite immature and are influenced by the older non-commissioned leaders in the unit. If the senior men in the barracks are drinkers,

⁷Thomas A. Harris, Counseling the Serviceman and His Family (Englewood Cliffs: New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1964), p. 73.

the young men will often try to identify with them. This makes them feel that they are "real men" and accepted as part of the group. A young man, who is away from home for the first time, tends to experiment with alcohol to excess.

Married servicemen often are separated from their families. Their wives and children are not there to provide the needed affection. Often they feel that any allotments they have ought to suffice for their families. It is apparent that "these separations tend to encourage more drinking."⁸

If recreational facilities are not adequate, particularly in remote overseas locations, the serviceman turns to the military club where activities are usually centered around the consumption of alcohol.

The military is known for its very active social life. A few examples are hail-and-farewell, promotion, cocktail, and wetting-down parties, "happy hours" at the various clubs, and "beer busts" for the troops. It has been stated by an Alcoholics Anonymous member, "that the continual round of mandatory cocktail parties makes it difficult for military alcoholics to avoid a drinking environment."⁹

The military clubs sell alcoholic beverages at a very economical price, especially in the overseas areas. During happy hours the already low prices are further discounted. The individual who goes to the "happy hour" and tries to do a full

⁸U.S. Congress, Alcoholism Among Military Personnel, p. 6.

⁹Ibid.

night's drinking in sixty minutes, quickly finds himself intoxicated. "An economical price, coupled with ready availability, tends to increase consumption." ¹⁰ Many researchers disagree that the cost factor would have any influence on alcoholics or problem drinkers.

The tendency to cover up the alcoholic throughout the chain of command in the military adds to the alcoholic's problem. Instead of an alcoholic coming forward and seeking help, he has the support of his family or a sympathetic commander who does not want to jeopardize the servicemen's career. Doctors have been known to cover for individuals and cite related illnesses.

All of these conditions tend to promote alcohol abuse in the military. It has been stated that:

The abuse of alcohol cannot be pinned to one specific cause. Most sociologists studying the matter believe it to be a combination of physical, social and psychological factors. ¹¹

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Commanders Digest, "Alcohol Abuse Program Explained." 28 December 1972.

CHAPTER III

SOLUTIONS AND WAYS TO MEET THE CHALLENGE OF ALCOHOL ABUSE IN THE MILITARY

The solution to the alcohol abuse problem in the military is not simple. The search for a solution to alcohol abuse in the Army dates back to colonial days when:

Dr. Benjamin Rush, the Surgeon General of the Army in 1777, tried to encourage troops not to drink while on active duty. Various Secretaries of War beginning with John Calhoun in 1818 saw the problem excessive drinkers were causing, but their attempt to solve the problems for the most part, met with failure because the personnel within the Army have the same attitudes and weaknesses as those of the civilian society from which they come.¹²

The solution to the alcohol problem of the military, is continual education at all levels of the military community. Our society must accept the fact that alcohol is a dangerous addictive drug that kills more Americans than all other drugs combined.

The military can also learn from what industry is doing to combat alcoholism in its midst. The Army supervisors must be trained to recognize problem drinkers and refer them to a trained counselor. A man with an alcoholic problem can be referred to treatment and if he refuses to cooperate he can be

¹²Arthur V. Wood, Chaplain, Headquarters, 9th Infantry Division, Fort Lewis, Washington, 9 October 1973, personal letter, p. 2.

eliminated from the service.

Basically the military must attack the alcohol problem by: (1) prevention, (2) education, (3) early identification and intervention.

A few of the larger posts have made significant preventive efforts in alcohol abuse.

At one base a local alcoholism council sponsored a seminar on alcoholism and accident proneness which was attended by 1,200 first and second-level military and civilian supervisors. At another base brief mention was made of the consequences of excessive use of alcohol in drug seminars for military personnel. At Fort Benning the prevention effort consisted of contacting unit commanders and supervisors and issuing a bulletin describing the base's alcoholism treatment program. Also, alcoholism prevention instruction was planned in the base's extensive military training program when four additional personnel could be hired. ¹³

The attitudes in the military must be changed to have an effective prevention program. This must begin at the highest level. The social activities in the military will always be a part of its tradition, but alcohol must take a less important role in social gatherings. We can begin by shortening "happy hours" in the service clubs here and abroad, and by raising the prices of liquor in the P's and class six stores. It is recommended that all of the social gatherings and especially at the clubs, there be free coffee, tea and soft drinks available. This increase of cost could be defrayed by increasing the price of alcoholic beverages. It is interesting to note that the military spends millions of dollars towards alcohol

¹³U.S., Congress, Alcoholism Among Military Personnel, p. 12.

prevention, but on many occasions this money seems to be going down the drain.

There will be a mandatory 15 minute Call for all Fort Hamilton Officer personnel on 12 Oct 73, at 1600 hours at the Officer's Club. One Hour will follow the meeting. Civilian employees will also attend. 14

The author recommends that educational programs be established to inform military personnel of the dangers of the abusive use of alcohol, that this educational program convince supervisors that alcoholism is a disease, and that many alcoholics can recover and become productive in the military.

The military must place greater emphasis upon existing alcohol rehabilitation programs such as Alcoholics Anonymous, drug and alcohol counselors, Al-Anon, and Al-Teen.

It is imperative that early identification and intervention be practiced in the military. This would mean that a person with an alcoholic problem would not be covered or hidden by the commander or family members. This would be a positive move to assist the person in rehabilitation. At present the military is doing something in the field of alcohol control and rehabilitation. Many of the large posts have established policies for early detection. This is being accomplished through a referral from the courts, command, medical and self.

¹⁴Fort Hamilton Weekly Bulletin, 11 October 1973.

CONCLUSION

The extent of alcohol abuse in the military cannot at this time be accurately determined. There is very little statistical data available to make a valid appraisal.

The research of this paper shows positive attitudes and atmosphere that contribute to alcohol abuse. This includes tradition, social life, family separations and clubs. The writer believes that any encouragement to drink and any establishment of a permissive attitude toward drinking will contribute to alcoholism or problem drinking.

Many solutions are being initiated to meet the challenge of alcohol abuse in the military. Some of these programs are prevention, education, identification and intervention. Time will be the factor which determines which of these programs are the most effective.

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